Thompson: Thank you so much, Kevin, for being with us today. This is Jordyn and I's first in-person interview for this Twilight Project, and we are really excited for the conversation today and the opportunity to hear your reflections at Middlebury, athletics, all of the above. Without further ado, would you want to give an introduction of yourself, who you are, your time leading up to Middlebury, how you got into sports, and all of that.

Chu: Sure, I would be happy to. How much time do you have?

{laughter}

So my name is Kevin Chu. I use he/him pronouns. I grew up in Burlington, Vermont during a pretty special time when immigrants and refugees were coming from all over the world. Grew up in the New North End, and my Vermont experience was very different than what people think of of the Vermont experience. I grew up playing soccer and basketball. My dad was the one who introduced me to those sports, and it was a really good way for our family to stay connected and just have fun together. When he's done with work or on weekends when I didn't have homework so… sports were introduced to me as a way to be connected with people. That's something that will come up again in my story as very core to how I see athletics. I did soccer and track-- or soccer and basketball for a while and then, started to do track in middle school as a way to cross train for the other sports, and ended up really liking the community. I happened to have success with the sport, so I continued with it through high school and then to college, as you probably know from my background. I competed as a Track & Field athlete here, at Middlebury.

But before Middlebury, I was thinking that I would want to pursue Division I soccer, so that was my primary sport in high school. And I did a post-grad year at a school called Kent in Connecticut. The more I learned about Division I soccer, the less I wanted to do it.

{laughter}

But it was a fantastic opportunity to pursue that to a pretty high level. Have a better understanding of what I would sign up for if I were to go that route. But like I said, I didn't feel like it was the right path for me. I really wanted a school with a strong academic focus, and personally having a balance of athletics and academics, Middlebury seemed like a good fit. It was a chance for me to come home to my home state, Vermont, which I feel really connected to. There was also a big social difference between a public school in Burlington, Vermont and a boarding school in Kent, Connecticut in terms of demographics and the social dynamics. So, for example, when I was at Burlington, my soccer team senior year had nine different countries represented on an 18-person roster. {jokes} I guess typical Vermont. I just learned so much being around people with different backgrounds and perspectives. Things that you can't really learn in a classroom, just happen through organic, informal conversations. Our soccer season my

senior year coincided with Ramadan and half of the team was fasting. So we would schedule practices late, you know, do homework with each other before practice and a team dinner after the sun went down after people started to break their fast. That led to conversations that, again, don't show up in history class. You just learn about people by being with them. Like I said, demographics that were represented at Kent were probably more closely aligned with what you might think of at a place like Middlebury, which set me up well to come here and [to] know what to expect. Not only a racial and ethnic mix, but also the amount of socioeconomic privilege that I encountered wasn't something that I saw in public school. Not that it's good or bad; it's just a different reality.

Johnson: I think it's great that your team was so accommodating to those players, like scheduling practices. And you guys took that as a learning opportunity, not like, "ugh we have to do all this stuff for these people." We're going to support them and do stuff like this.

Chu: I can expand deeper into that story. I remember before my senior year, that soccer team. There were preseason rankings in the local newspaper. Ranked middle of the table. One of the criticisms against the potential for our success was the amount of diversity. The fact that not everyone spoke the same language, so how could we communicate about team chemistry. And, we-- we really took that as a challenge. {chuckles} Of course we ended up being pretty mediocre during the season. Not because of the chemistry issues, but because the team was fasting {light laughs}. They were expected to perform at a peak level while not being nourished during the day. We ended up going into the playoffs in the number eight seed in the state. Ramadan happened to end when the regular season ended. Team started eating regularly again, and the team ended up going all the way to the championship.

So we knocked off the number one seed, the number two seed, and people are like, "how are they playing this well? This never showed up in the regular season."

Johnson: So, how were you exactly recruited for Middlebury? You were focusing on soccer when you were at boarding school. I'm guessing you were still doing track during that boarding school time. And then, did Middlebury reach out to you? Did you find Midd?

Chu: Yeah, that's a great question. So I first got connected to Coach Martin Beatty when I was still in high school, because I was having some success in Track and Field. I always knew it was an option for me if I wanted to pursue college athletics and be a track athlete. I was also connect with Coach David Saward at the time for soccer, so I had multiple connections to Middlebury. And then I had mentors in Burlington who were Middlebury alumni, who thought I would be a good fit for the school.

So when I went to Kent, they actually did not have a track team.

Thompson: oh no! That's not good.

Chu: I continued practicing on my own. Used chairs are hurdles. I made it work {laughs}. So when I was at Kent, I applied early to Middlebury when I figured out in my head that I wanted to go the Division III route. So I just kept lines with communication with the coaches, even before I went to Kent, to let them know that I was doing that post-grad year and the intention behind it. I know that some of the coaches would have liked to see me go directly from Burlington to Middlebury, but no one told me that going to Kent was a bad decision. Like everyone was supportive and that left an impression on me.

Johnson: What made you decide to do track here, at Middlebury, and not do soccer?

Chu: I actually did soccer my freshman year, and it was a lot for me as a first-year student to do soccer, then indoor track, and then outdoor track. And then summer training for soccer. It felt like I was in-season year round. I was.

Thompson: You were!

Chu: To make friends and get enough sleep and do well in classes. I wouldn't say that I did all of those things well. I'll let you figure out which of those I did poorly. I won't say that in this interview!

{light laughter}

Because I recognized that not all those things were going well, I knew that I had to give something up. The way that I rationalized it in my head was that I could always find a pickup soccer game. No one does a pick up track meets, and I felt a really strong sense of community with the track team. Really strong connection with Coach Beatty. At the time, I played a center back position on the soccer team. The center back on the team was an All-American upperclassman. I knew that my impact on the track team was going to be larger than my impact on the soccer team. So in terms of what I could contribute to the programs, I felt like I could have more of an impact on the track team.

Thompson: Very cool. Could you walk us through a little bit of your first year? 'Cuz you did mention that you were in-season the whole time, but you got to experience athletics in a unique way. Different team cultures, dynamics… also just like there seems to be—at least now—a culture of student-athletes. What was that like to *always* be a student-athlete?

Chu: I think when I first started, that first month, I really appreciated having a connection to athletics. The reason why is because I had as social network, a support network, immediately. I

was accepted into that team and had people looking out for me, that would give me advice on classes...that would help me navigate my way around campus. I actually missed the regular orientation because of preseason, but walking around campus I would see familiar faces, which made it easier that first month. But then there's a period where all the other first-years are doing other programming and meeting each other, and I'm at practice. I started to feel after a month or two, "maybe I'm not getting the whole Middlebury experience. Maybe I'm seeing Middlebury through this narrow lens of athletics." That started to plant the seed in my head that maybe I need to give up something in order to figure out what I'm passionate about academically, in order to figure out that I have friends besides athletes. That was important to me too. As I mentioned earlier, the experience I had growing up in a diverse community...I recognized that being surrounded by people who sort of talk the same way, talk the same language all the time would really inhibit my own growth. Whether the identity is along racial and ethnic lines, socioeconomic lines, or even sports as an identity, right? That's something we can carry and hold. I work with a lot of different types of athletes and they come to me and say, "I am a soccer player." They are coming to me to do track and field type of training, but really they're doing speed training to help with soccer. Really, I don't tell them how to identify as an athlete. I think athletics can be in that identity conversation and intersection with other identities in interesting ways. I realize that if I just went through all four years at Middlebury being in-season year round, that I would be limiting my experience through that lens of athletics.

Johnson: So where were you able to find those other places of community outside of athletics at Middlebury after you made the decision to not continue soccer?

Chu: Yeah, I have really strong connections and love my experience in the Education Studies program. I was an Education Studies minor. That allowed me to not only build a strong community on campus through my courses [and] through conversations with my professors, but I also got connected to the community around Middlebury. I helped to put together a mentorship program doing tutoring at the local high school. I got some athletes—mostly track athletes—to spend some time at the high school to speak with students, whether it was about their academic work or about the college experience, the college application process, which can be mystifying at times. To begin to break down that town barrier, because the experience of being here, at Middlebury, should be more than what's contained on campus. We're surrounded by beautiful landscapes and such loving people in the community that *want* to be connected to the College. So that was an avenue of creating connections between the College and the town.

{laughter}

Pretty funny.

Thompson: Not funny at all. You can tell it's our first time doing an in-person interview [together], because we're like "who's next?"

Johnson: I know I would love to hear about the difference in team culture between soccer and the track and field team, and what those are like.

Chu: Can I press my unmute button now? {laughter}

So the soccer team is obviously a smaller roster. Because of that, the size of groups affects dynamics. Track team was about 100 people. The other big, glaring difference was really a single entity between two genders. Men's team and women's team. Acknowledging that there is a spectrum for gender but that's how we classify it in athletics. Whereas, my experience with the men's soccer team is through the lens of men's sports. So, I think I'll start of by explaining those two differences.

I felt like men's soccer team, because it was a smaller group, everyone that was a member of that group was sort of fully in. Part of the "in" group. Whereas with the track team, you get disciplines. There's sprint runners, distance runners, throwers, [and] jumpers. Even though there's this *big* roster, there's also these subgroups. That also affects the dynamics. I'm wondering if that answers your questions.

Johnson: I was sort of wondering when you're socializing with these different teams, your experience in those teams. But also, how that...the team on the campus, too. Identifying with the soccer team on campus. Identifying with the track team on campus, and your experience with that within the greater campus.

Chu: So I think if we took a broad poll throughout the U.S., soccer would be more popular than track. {laughter} You see that show up in the social scene in terms of the role that the soccer team had on campus, as a sort of social hub. Because we don't have sororities or fraternities, the athletic teams end up being those entities that influence the social team. It's like, "oh, the soccer guys are hosting a party at their suite or house." I felt like the soccer team played a bigger role in that social science across Middlebury campus, and a little more pull. If that soccer team was putting on an event, word got around and people wanted to show up. Whereas the track team, being a less popular sport and being a huge team, we can have a fun time by ourselves. So for me, I felt like the experiences of my freshman year, I saw the whole scope of that. I didn't feel as comfortable at times at parties with the soccer team. Some of the drinking and drug use...it turned me off a bit. That was also a factor in my decision to just do track.

Johnson: And, I would love to hear about your success at track and how you were able to achieve multiple individual championships on the track team and about that time.

Chu: Oof, yeah. I have to give *a lot* of credit to my coaches and my team there. I mean, even though when I run a race it is an individual pursuit, all the factors that led up to that moment… I can't claim full responsibility for that. I was not really the type that would practice really well. I would get my ass kicked in practice quite frequently. I thank my teammates for doing that and pushing me to the next level. But I was the type that on gameday or meet day, I got hyped. And there was just that sort of adrenaline rush that would allow me to perform really well. I really-- I love Martin Beatty. I can say that flat out.

Thompson: He's awesome.

Chu: His guidance for me not only on the track, but just as a life mentor. He's been a father figure for me. Has helped me through some tough times and we've had so many good conversations that had nothing to do with track. I think that really helped my track success as well, to be able to approach athletics with a sense of balance, a sense of purpose and reason. He helped guide my development as a leader. So I felt a sense of responsibility and leadership every time I stepped onto the track to sort of lead by example. I definitely can't claim that any success on the track was solely mine.

Thompson: You are definitely not alone in your sentiment about Martin. He seems like he is just one of a kind coach. It seems like-- if you get to meet with him and work with him, you're really lucky is what I'm hearing from a lot of alumni, current athletes and my own sentiment with working with him.

Chu: Yeah, if I had to identify a single person to represent my connection to Middlebury, it would be Martin Beatty.

Thompson: So flipping that a little bit, we saw that you came back as an assistant coach at one point. What brought you back? To specifically Midd and to athletics? Wanting to continue to be a part of the athletic community post-Midd?

Chu: Yeah, so I mentioned education earlier. I did student teaching after I graduated, so I was working at Union high school. Simultaneously, I was working with the track team. I was just going to do it as a volunteer anyways, but Martin, being the great person that he is, offered me an assistant role in an official capacity with a small stipend, which definitely helped...because student teaching is student teaching. I don't really have to say anything more about that. {laughs} And, I really appreciated being able to continue my relationships that I had already made. When I was in a leadership role as a captain, so I felt like I didn't have to reinvent myself and my identity. I could just play to my strengths. And, I see coaching and teaching as very similar fields, as well. So as I thought about my development as an educator, coaching was a big

part of that. And having both the athletics piece and the in-class piece, I felt like I was approaching education in a more holistic perspective. Interestingly, I worked with the jumpers as an assistant coach, even though I competed as a sprinter/hurdler. But I had some jumper experience and it also pushed me to do a bit of professional development and get my U.S.A. Track and Field coaching certifications. And, to become more of a student of the sport as a whole versus a student of my specific event in the sport. And, it also allowed me to start creating more interdisciplinary connections within the team. Right, we talked about how there's different disciplines—jumps, throws, sprints, distance. But there are a lot of transferable skills between those events. Being fast and explosive...well it's transferable beyond track. And I can tell you a little bit more about Sprinticity {points to hat with Sprinticity logo} afterwards. But our jumpers would do some workouts with our throwers doing biometrics, because you're really explosive. You can throw a shot put really far and long jump really far. Create new social groups within the disciplines of the track team. That was really important to me, too. Coaching to make sure the team felt connected, so we brought that into the work we did with the track team.

I've always-- I want to stay connected to athletics, even beyond my time competing. I still train and compete, but I know my days are probably going to be waning pretty soon. Through coaching I can still stay connected.

Thompson: Before jumping into whatever is next, I'm curious to know more about your perspective, because you, now, have been a part of Middlebury Athletics for a long time now. As a student-athlete, an undergraduate in the programs. And you got to see a new perspective as a faculty member. So, kind of zooming out a little bit from just the Track team, can you tell us more about what it was like to be a faculty member? In terms of being an assistant coach. Did you get a chance to chat with other assistant coaches? Or...can you say "in-house" in terms of the Track team?

Chu: I know what you mean when you say that. Just to clarify it was a staff position. It gave me access to the broader athletics community. Again, like you said, the perspective change from being a student-athlete to a coach is *huge*. I'll use this opportunity to talk about my own perspective change and how I perceive athletics over time. Early on, it was very performance driven. I need to run this time or play this well to get recruited by colleges. I'm talking about my high school-self right now. It was performance driven. And then, when I got to college, I was pretty real with myself. I was not going to be a pro-athlete. I knew that I would have some success in college, nor did I think I wanted to be a pro-athlete, especially in track. That's just not a financially sustainable track to pursue unless you're the best of the best. So, it had to become something else. It wasn't just performance driven, because I wasn't qualified for the next thing. It became more about a process of self-development...which generally is sort of the period of time of one's life of going through college. A period of maximizing potentially to set you up for the next stage of life. But after graduation, I was still competing and I was still training. I sat

down one day and, “Why? Why am I still doing this?” I think that’s an important question to ask ourselves in any activity that we do, and make sure it aligns with who we are and our ambitions. So after college, there is the coaching piece. I was coaching and still competing. For me, I realized that athletics was a very balancing part of my life. I could have the stress of work, whatever day job that I’m doing, and always come to a happy place on the track or on the soccer pitch. Really any sport. I just love being active. Picked up mountain biking during the pandemic last year. I’m sure a lot of people did. And, especially with hurdling, because that’s my passion within track. It’s a very meditative practice for me. If we think about what meditation is or what it helps you do, it’s to be present and in the moment. Going as fast as you can with 42 inch hurdles in the way, you can’t really be thinking of anything else. You’re fully in that moment. Or, you might hit the hurdle. For me to have that meditative practice, that happy place, that was a good enough reason for me to continue with it.

Now, I’m starting to move into a phase of my life where athletics represents an avenue of community building. I think I mentioned that earlier in this conversation, but I really admire the power athletics bring people together, especially people from very, very different walks of life. And, I’m intentional about that in the way I develop athletic programming and the culture that I build within teams. It influences *how* I coach, too.

Johnson: Yeah, I was going to ask. I would love to hear more about Sprint--

Thompson: Sprinticity

Chu: Rhymes with simplicity.

Johnson: On how you co-founded that program, founded that program, and how you run that now.

Chu: It started off as an idea during MiddCORE. I did MiddCORE between my junior and senior year as part of the Innovation Challenge. I was thinking about ways to continue competing after college. I knew, because of the amount of time and effort and energy I spent on track, that it would be hard for me to just go cold turkey and not do track after college. “So alright, how do I continue competing?” So I started looking for organizations, track clubs in Vermont because I knew I was going to be doing some student teaching. I started looking around and all that I could find was distance-running based. When I zoom out a little bit and look at the running community defined more broadly in the U.S., when I tell someone—just a random person on the street—most of the time they will ask about 5k times and marathons that I’ve run, what’s my mile pace. I love telling people that my mile pace is 3:20. Don’t tell them that I don’t do the full mile. {laughs} but for those 400 meters, I’m on 3:20 pace. So, I recognize...I’ll put it through the lens of MiddCORE… entrepreneurship… there was a market opportunity. Because I couldn’t be the

only one that wanted to continue sprinting beyond college. There were probably people out there, but the opportunities didn't exist. What started off as a MiddCORE project, hung onto that idea. After I graduated, I launched a track club and was able to convince some of my close friends that it was a good idea and to join. It helped build a critical mass and give the organization legitimacy. And, I leveraged some of my social capital of being a Vermonter and the networking connections I've made over the years to bring more people into the organization. Once it hit that critical mass, it was amazing how many phone calls and emails I get from people in their 30's, 40's, 50's...all the way up to-- I've worked with the oldest athlete is an 87-year-old. Folks that love sprinting, love jumping, love non-distance running.

They just never had the community to do it. The first few years of the organization was track and field focus. We were competing in the U.S. Track and Field circuit. We were New England either indoor or outdoor champions or both for four consecutive years. Little team in Vermont competing against bigger Boston track clubs. You know the entire state of Vermont has 600,000 people about, that's smaller than just the city of Boston. We could put up a fight. That was the early phase of Sprinticty.

The more recent evolution of the organization, you'll probably see from my hat, it's no longer the Sprinticy Track Club. I've rebranded it to be Sprinticy Athletics. That's the idea of transferable skills and being fast and able to jump really well makes you good at a lot of different sports. We approach it through the athletic development lens, and it's allowed for some creative and collaborative partnerships. For example, I'll do clinics for soccer clubs, for the Burlington Parks and Rec program. And, it's really fun working with soccer players because I played soccer. I understand that mentality, and most of the time when they train, kids have a ball at their feet. And, I ask them, "during a game, how often do you have a ball at your feet? If you can estimate the percentage of total playing time." Most of them overestimate, but if you look at literature, each player may have the ball 2-3% of the game. And then I ask them, "Alright, what's the other 98%?" You're starting to answer this in your head. It's being an athlete. I got to be able to run around, jump, get to the position, so I can have the ball for three seconds before passing it to someone else. The rebranding of Sprinticity, it does fit with the way that I approach sports, again, more holistically and building community. Because now I'm saying, "no, it's not just track and field athletes that I want to work with." I want to work with anyone who is interested in this broader form of athletic development.

Johnson: Please come to softball.

Chu: Alright!

Johnson: I ran track and cross country in high school and stuff. I'm very much like, "we need to be fast at softball, too." And there like, "oh no, we don't run that much." I'm like, "it's helpful to be fast."

Chu: Acceleration between the bases. And the training for that skill should almost look like a track and field curriculum.

Johnson: I know! The other day we were working on-- I play outfield, so you're supposed to be pumping your arms through the ball and you're only supposed to put your glove out at the last minute. From Track, I'm used to this motion of good form. When people run like this, I'm just like, "how do you run like this?" It doesn't make sense in my head.

Chu: If you look at the rest of the world, in a lot of countries Track and Field is called "athletics." It's athletics, not track and field. I think that the way other countries perceive the sport of athletics—track and field—serves as a foundation for all the other sports.

Johnson: So, originally was it focused on people post-grad in terms of that focus of getting them back into sprinting, as it is now any age?

Chu: We work with people of all ages. The age range that I've worked with, let's see. The youngest I've worked with would be four. The oldest is 87. Our summer training group is pretty open. We get a spectrum of people. And then, I'll do some targeted clinics, especially for teams where we can go into more sport-specific skills. I try to differentiate instruction so it's relevant to the athletes I'm working with. But some of the larger groups, I have to take a more general approach, which is fine because it achieves the goal of community building. It's fun when you get a middle school kid working with a 60-year-old, talking to each other. Starting to learn from each other, sharing knowledge across generations. I've been really happy with that summer training group being the foundation for some of the other offerings that we have. I'll do some private one-on-one coaching. I really like working with teams. So there have been a lot of opportunities that have emerged, sometimes not from my pursuing them but from them talking to each other and then, coming to me and asking if there is a service I can provide to meet their needs.

Thompson: Sure. I really like that mindset. I really agree with that mindset.

Johnson: I want to hear what you're doing at UVM right now, post-Midd.

Chu: So I've held a few positions at UVM. I started off in undergraduate admissions, interestingly in a role specifically focused on recruiting diversity and managing our urban partnerships. I can say more about that. So, UVM has partnerships with high schools in New

York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago. And students from these schools [who] meet the academic standards for UVM and get into UVM, we make sure to cover all their demonstrated need, so then the financial piece isn't a burden. I've been a strong advocate for expanding that model, especially in our own backyard because there is diversity to be found in Vermont. I said directly to the office, "if you're going to pay me to go to New York and Philadelphia, why not have me drive down the road or bike down the road?" I would usually bike around town. I'll go visit Burlington High School. I went there. I'll go visit Winooski. I think we're starting to make some progress in that space. But in that role, as I recruited students in, I think if we look at the way admissions traditionally works at most schools and sort of working with prospective students up until the point where they decide to come to the school. There's sort of a hand-off to other entities on campus, but I recommend the power of relationships. If I develop relationships while they're still in high school and they choose to come to UVM, on day one, I might be one of the only faces that they recognize. So, I serve in a mentorship capacity for students that I have recruited, showing them that I am committed to their success. Meeting with them at the beginning of the school year, getting them connected to the resources within the community. Just that burden can't fall to a single person of color to ensure the success of all these students, right? So, I would keep these relationships with students even after they showed up at UVM, which I think is very different than what you find in a traditional admissions model. {whispers} This might something to recommend .

Johnson: I really like that because I actually have that connection with my admissions officer. I've had one-on-one chats with her. She wrote me a letter actually when I got in. she's like, "Hi, I'm your admissions person." So, I really enjoy that because I come from Alabama, so nobody—there's barely anyone from my state that I knew. To have someone that you can go to on campus, I think that's really important. It's neglected in a way, because people are like, "Oh you're in college. You're supposed to meet all these other people." But it can be really difficult to do that, especially when people are like, "Where are you from?" And they're like, "I'm a J-O-B." I don't have that. Alabama…Montgomery? Not really close to that.

Chu: The other thing, too, is the assumptions that institutions make about the knowledge that students are bringing to college. Like the word "registrar." The first time I saw "registrar," I was like, "who misspelled register?"

Johnson: Same!

{general laughter}

Chu: And if we want to create a sort of a more equitable environment when students arrive, let's make sure, let's be explicit in asking what they know and what they want to do, and make sure we get them connected to the resources to pursue those goals—those dreams—that they're

bringing to campus. You can't just assume that they have the background, the knowledge sometimes coming from family members.

My parents immigrated to the U.S. in '86. And neither of them went to college, so I couldn't ask my mom, "oh, how was your college experience?" That wasn't a conversation that we had. I had to file my own FAFSA and CSS Profile. I had to learn how taxes worked as a high school kid because I wanted to go to college. And that's a burden that a lot of my peers didn't have. Those are some of the barriers to success. It happens more often for students of color, who are more likely to be first gen. I think that conversations around even those simple things of how do we create a more intentional bridge between high school and college...maybe through the relationships admissions can help facilitate. That might move the needle. I'm not saying it's *the* solution, but it can be part of a solution. Institutions are complex systems--

Thompson: Yes.

Chu: There are no simple answers.

Thompson: That is definitely true, but it seems like that face-to-face impact on an individual level is very meaningful, so that's very cool.

Kind of just looking forward now—and also backwards at the same time—

Chu: I realized I didn't fully answer the UVM-part of that question. So um, I started off in admission and then, I moved into an academic advising role. Part of that was because I started making these professional connections through my work with the students that got to UVM. I also wanted to pursue a Master's in educational leadership, which I have about a year left in that program. The travel requirement of admissions made it really hard to try to take classes because I would be on the road 2-3 three weeks at a time during the 12 weeks in the Fall. I couldn't just tell professors, "Yeah, I'm going to miss half a semester." So I switched over to academic advising in the environment program, which is a really good fit. It was like academic coaching. I was Environmental Studies major here, at Middlebury, so I had the content background and also sort of the soft skills of how to be a coach. Brought those two skills sets into the advising role. That started to initiate a phase of my professional development during time at UVM where I learned a lot more about the internal operations. Admissions is very external-focused, so learning surface-level details of what was happening on UVM because I needed to share that on the road. But then I got into the intricate details of operations when I got into advising. I had to know how the curriculum works. I had to know faculty expertise. I had to understand other academic options on campus. Did that for about a year and a half. Absolutely loved my time in that role. And then I got asked to take on a role with the Rubenstein School of the Environment and Natural Resources.

I had started some communication initiatives while being an academic advisor, which weren't really part of the job description, but I just felt that good communications was part of getting good information to the right people at the right time. Just made my job a lot easier because I was proactively solving problems before they happened. I got asked to do that on a school-wide level and also guide some of our strategic planning. They were going through a strategic planning process and, because of my educational leadership program that I was in, I was doing a lot of work with organizational change, anyways, in my coursework. I got to apply it to what I was doing with the Rubenstein school. I was in that role for about a year.

Most recently, last November, I joined the Office of Engagement as the Managing Director. So the new office launched last July. A great time to launch an office in the middle of a pandemic. Not meeting your coworkers in person for eight months. The Office of Engagement is a partnership with the State of Vermont, and the idea is for the office to serve as a "front door" for the University to work on economic development and workforce development issues. UVM is a talent pipeline for the State of Vermont. If we look at the demographic trends, even prior to COVID, there were issues with young people leaving and people aging out of the workforce. And, UVM being the largest university in the state and bringing young talent into the state every year. So by partnering with the state, we are starting to intentionally create programs for getting them to envision what a life in Vermont might be like. Start contributing to the Vermont economy and our State's success moving forward. So, I've been in that role since November. I think that's a good launching off point for the next question, like future-oriented planning.

Thompson: Yeah, I think looking towards the future in terms of more specifically athletics. We can talk about what you want to see in athletics in terms of higher edu. But also just in general, in terms of it seems like you work with a lot of young people. I say that as a young person myself

Chu: When do I leave that category?

Thompson: That's your own…you can say "never."

Chu: I came back as a guest speaker a few times for MiddCORE. And they were like "MiddCORE young alumni panel," and I asked them last time I showed up… "so when do I stop being a young alum?" There was no straight answer.

Thompson: That's up to you, I think. Maybe I'll get to see you at a MiddCORE panel. I've done MiddCORE myself. But what do you see for the future, in the short terms…four years? That's normally the typical time people matriculate through a college or university experience. That's kind of what is next for them. How did they pick those four years they had and use them? What would you want those four years to look like for them?

Chu: Yeah, I feel like I've said a lot, so I'll try to be succinct with this answer. But I think there's a huge opportunity in terms of athletes to really start considering its intersectionality with other identities that people hold. I think it's too easy to box off athletes as almost a separate population from the rest of the college or university. But I think there's a broader level of pro sports. We're seeing athletes really get involved in the community on social justice issues and they are bringing to the table these multiple identities that they hold and using the platform of athletics to instigate change. I think there's an opportunity for that to happen at the college level, the youth level, and stop recognizing athletes as just athletes. That's just one small part of the whole picture of who these human beings are. If there is anything that I could change it would be that.

Johnson: I feel like that is already proven with something that you said early about how you could go to Martin Beatty for anything and how that helped your experience in track. I feel like people don't realize that if you're stressed in life, that's going to affect how you perform. So even if you see your sport as a de-stressor, those outside stressors can affect your performance. Your coaches or athletic department are not willing you're not just an athlete or robot but to acknowledge you as a full human. How that can help athletes achieve another level in terms of performances but also impact on campus.

Chu: It goes the other way, too, athletes can have a direct positive or negative impact on the classroom. Social connection with other students, with the community. So, we need to stop putting it in its own box.

Thompson: Well, thank you so much for your time today. We really have appreciated hearing your reflections at Midd, but also just mentality on athletics and sports. You've had a huge impact it seems in every community that you've been a part of, and for the better so that's very cool to hear about.